

IMPRIMIS

Because Ideas Have Consequences

March 1994 Volume 23, No. 3

22nd
year

510,000 subscribers

"How to Fight Back Against Liberalism"

by William Kristol

Chairman, Project for the Republican Future

Former White House chief of staff for Vice President Dan Quayle, William Kristol is currently chairman of the Project for the Republican Future. He has also served as chief of staff for Secretary of Education William Bennett; as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; and as director of the Bradley Project on the 90's for the Bradley Foundation of Milwaukee.



Dr. Kristol's published work has appeared in such sources as the *Chicago Law Review*, the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, the *Public Interest*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. ▲

Preview: *We live at a moment in time in which the potential for regaining control over our lives is greater than ever. Socialism and communism abroad, and liberalism at home, are dying. Though in its quest to nationalize health care the Clinton administration is pushing for the most sweeping regulation in our history, people everywhere are rebelling—they are, says William Kristol, fed up with the broken promises of liberalism. The question is, will conservatism provide them with a real alternative?*

The great paradox of the 1990s is that while liberalism is on its death bed in this country, it still controls almost all our major institutions. On the one hand, its claims have been so often disproved by history and by empirical evidence that it has exhausted its strength. On the other hand, liberalism dominates the presidency, Congress, education, the media, and even certain segments of the private sector.

What is most striking is how thoroughly liberalism has lost popular support. Despite the Democratic presidential victory in 1992 (with, after all, only 43 percent of the vote) polls indicated that most Americans believe the federal government creates more problems than it solves and that Americans tend to favor lower taxes and less government. They also believe that government should support traditional family values as opposed to promoting "alternative lifestyles." In short, the majority of Americans distrust contemporary liberalism.

Liberals' Loss of Faith

Even many liberals have lost faith in liberalism. In the 1960s and 1970s, liberals wholeheartedly believed that (1) Keynesian economics would work to end the ups and downs of the business cycle, (2) government would manage the economy and increase economic growth, (3) liberal social programs would help end poverty and injustice, (4) "progressive" education would improve the performance of students, and (5) "liberation" from conventional morality would make people happier, better adjusted, and more fulfilled. Today, however, it is rare to find more than a handful of liberals who are willing to publicly and categorically defend these beliefs.

Look at how the rhetoric of liberalism has changed. President John F. Kennedy and his disciples had faith in "Progress." They preached that liberalism was the way of "Progress" and the way of the future. They ridiculed conservatives as reactionaries yearning for the past.

But today's liberals don't talk about "Progress." In his 1993 inaugural address, President Bill Clinton introduced a new liberal mantra: "Change." He declared, "We must make change our friend." (This reminds me of something my six-year-old might see on television. One can easily imagine Mr. Rogers telling his young viewers: "We must make change our friend.")

The switch from "Progress" to "Change" is no minor matter. It betrays a growing lack of confidence. Liberals are no longer sure that

"Liberalism is like a huge, condemned building. It's big and impressive, but one well-placed charge could bring down the whole edifice."

they are on the right side of history or that history is moving in their direction. Since the collapse of socialism and communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, they have desperately struggled to cling to their old beliefs, but to no avail. New rhetoric can't breathe life into a dying philosophy.

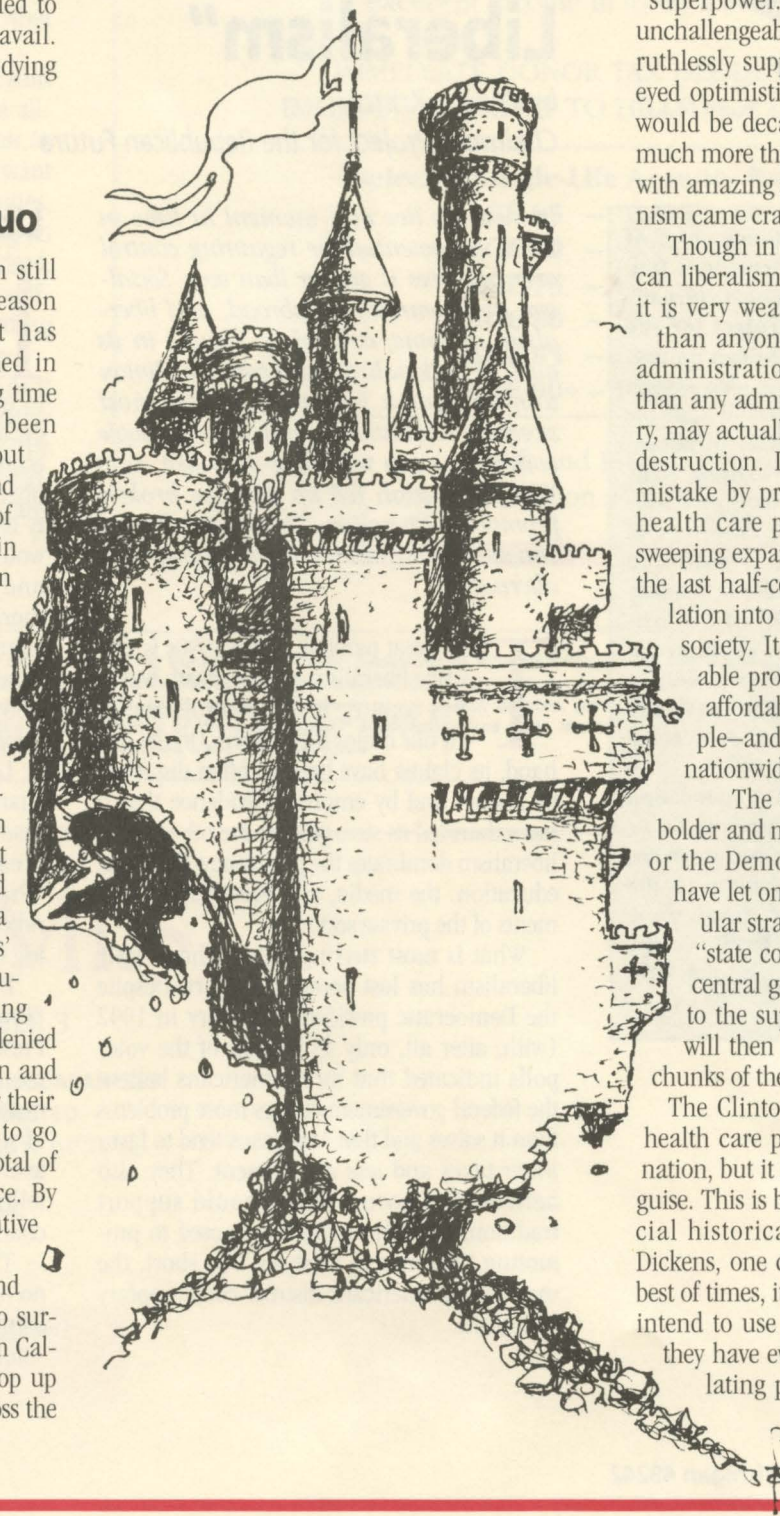
Liberal Attempts to Maintain the Status Quo

Why, then, does liberalism still dominate? Part of the reason lies in the fact that it has become deeply entrenched in our society. It can linger on for a long time even after its main strength has been exhausted. And for all their talk about "Change," politicians, bureaucrats, and the many and sundry beneficiaries of big government have a huge stake in liberalism's continued survival, i.e., in maintaining the status quo.

The recent vote on school choice in California is an example. Pro-school choice advocates were fighting to pass a voucher initiative that would give every student in California \$2,600 to use at the public or private school of his choice. No one on either side of the debate pretended that the public schools were doing a good job, or that the current system was a model for education. But the teachers' unions and the state education bureaucracy saw school choice as threatening their positions. Therefore, they hotly denied that competition is better for education and that parents know best how to care for their children. With a month and a half to go before the election, they had spent a total of \$8.9 million to defeat school choice. By contrast, the proponents of the initiative had spent only \$740,000.

Faced with such overwhelming and well-funded liberal opposition, it is no surprise that school choice was defeated in California in 1993. But the issue will crop up again and again in state elections across the

nation. When school choice eventually succeeds, it will mark the beginning of the end of the public school monopoly, and it will hasten liberalism's demise.



Liberalism's Coming Crash

Liberalism is like a huge, condemned building. It's big and impressive, but one well-placed charge could bring down the whole edifice. We saw this happen in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the 1980s. All the experts had been talking for years about how powerful the communist bloc had grown. The U.S.S.R. was a dangerous and aggressive "superpower." And it seemed virtually unchallengeable at home, for all dissent was ruthlessly suppressed. Even the most wild-eyed optimistic reformers predicted that it would be decades before we could expect much more than token liberalization. Then, with amazing speed, socialism and communism came crashing down.

Though in some respects modern American liberalism seems all-powerful, in truth, it is very weak. It could fall much faster than anyone now predicts. The Clinton administration, which is more left-wing than any administration in American history, may actually speed up the process of self-destruction. It has made a monumental mistake by proposing to enact a national health care plan. This plan is the most sweeping expansion of government power in the last half-century. It would extend regulation into every nook and cranny of our society. It would also take a manageable problem—difficulties in assuring affordable health care for some people—and transform it into a genuine nationwide crisis.

The Clinton health care plan is bolder and more dramatic than the media or the Democratic-controlled Congress have let on. It is reminiscent of a particular strain of fascism/socialism called "state corporatism," which allows the central government to dictate the rules to the supervisors and managers who will then be given authority over huge chunks of the private sector.

The Clinton administration's proposed health care plan is a major threat to our nation, but it may also be a blessing in disguise. This is because we are living at a special historical moment. To paraphrase Dickens, one could say, politically, it is the best of times, it is the worst of times. Liberals intend to use the plan to go further than they have ever tried to go before in regulating private behavior, but because they are overreaching their

grasp, they are losing legitimacy and popular support.

The Conservative Agenda

It is important to remember that the fact that liberalism is dying is no guarantee that conservatism will triumph. Conservatives must promote their *own* agenda.

First, conservatives must fight against liberalism on philosophic grounds. There is always the temptation, of course, to fight on the basis of expediency rather than principle, but this is a losing strategy. In the game of political compromise, liberalism controls most of our political and social institutions and thus holds all the cards.

Conservatives can do the private sector an invaluable service by making this point unmistakably clear. Too often, members of the private sector—big business executives in particular—are willing to “cut deals” in order to protect their shareholders and employees. They don’t realize that the protection they gain is only temporary and that it is purchased at too great a cost.

What happened to the leaders of the pharmaceutical industry in 1993 is a good example. The Clinton administration denounced them as “profiteers” and sent the message that they would be penalized because they dared to oppose national health care. Pharmaceutical stocks plunged and the leaders of the industry panicked. Instead of sticking to their guns and fighting on principle, they bought full-page newspaper ads assuring that they were in

favor of national health insurance as long as prescriptions were covered as part of the package. This kind of attempt to curry favor is both ignoble and unwise.

Second, conservatives must make the fight against liberalism broad rather than narrow. To cite the case of health care again, it is not enough simply to say that the Clinton plan will cost vastly more, or that it will be inefficient, even though both arguments are true. Conservatives must say loud and clear that the Clinton plan is fundamentally wrong. It will lead the country in the wrong direction. It will take away our freedom.

Similarly, it is not enough to argue that the employer-mandate provisions in the Clinton plan will cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. Conservatives must argue that it is fundamentally wrong to force employers to obey such provisions. (Besides, the Clinton administration can easily produce experts who will testify that the provisions will actually add 100,000 jobs. A traditional Washington debate, in which each side throws around meaningless numbers, will quickly ensue, obscuring what is really at stake.)

Third, conservatives need a positive agenda. We can’t just oppose liberalism, we have to create a viable alternative. A number of conservative leaders in Congress are doing just that. They know, for example, that they cannot simply criticize the Clinton administration’s national health care plan—they have to introduce their own reforms. They have proposed, among other things: (1) reforming insurance markets to

make health insurance more stable; (2) eliminating barriers to small business insurance pools; (3) lowering insurance premiums by making them tax deductible; (4) establishing tax-free medical savings accounts; (5) reducing costs through malpractice reform; (6) simplifying health care paperwork and administration; and (7) providing health care tax credits or vouchers to low-income families.

Fourth, conservatives must remember that it is easier to achieve big rather than little reforms. Most people tend to think that the best way to accomplish a task is to take one step at a time. But politics doesn’t always work that way. It is sometimes like technology: There are moments when huge, sudden leaps are possible.

Now is the time to leap. Americans are disenchanted with liberalism and with “politics-as-usual” inside the Washington Beltway. They are willing to support reforms that would have been unthinkable a short time ago. The Kemp-Roth tax plan was dismissed as unrealistic when it was introduced in the 1970s, but in the 1980s the Reagan administration relied on it to cut taxes by 30 percent. Term limits were regarded as a “fringe” idea up until a few years ago; in 1992, voters in 14 states passed initiatives limiting the terms of federal legislators and in 12 states they also limited the terms of state legislators. The recent “Perot phenomenon,” which resulted in a 19 percent

Do we have your correct address?
Indicate changes here. Or call:
1-800-437-2268

✓ boxes for more information:

- On-campus seminars of Hillsdale’s Center for Constructive Alternatives
- Off-campus seminars of Hillsdale’s Shavano Institute for National Leadership
- Student Admissions
- Gift and Estate Planning or Hillsdale Hostel (1-800-334-8904)
- Freedom Library books and tapes
- FreedomQuest Campaign

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution to Hillsdale College for: \$ _____

Do you know students interested in admission to Hillsdale College? We’ll lend them a video for free! To order “Hillsdale College Video Visit,” call 1-800-255-0384. (Orders only please—not an information line.)

Imprimis: (1-10 copies \$.75 each 25-\$10 50-\$15 100-\$25)

Qty.	Author/Title	Price
Subtotal		
Michigan residents, add 4% sales tax		
Total		

FREE SHIPPING!
(Please make checks payable to Hillsdale College)

Credit Card Donations/Orders Welcome!
VISA / MC / Discover

_____ Exp. mo/yr _____

Signature _____

vote for a third-party candidate, also suggests the willingness of the American people to embrace bold action.

Fifth, conservatives must make arguments that go beyond economics. Debates over all issues must take into account other factors besides dollars and cents. What is ultimately wrong with the Clinton administration's national health care plan is not what it will cost our economy (and it will cost billions of dollars) but how it will redefine the whole nature of the relationship between government and citizens in a free society. It will allow the state to tell us what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

On every issue, conservatives should shift the terms of debate in order to ask the all-important question: "*What does it mean to be a self-governing nation?*" People want to take care of themselves, their families, and their communities instead of relying on a "nanny state" to do it for them. Indeed, our insistence on independence and self-reliance has been our most outstanding quality for more than two hundred years.

That quality is just as strong now as it was in 1776. With it, and with a positive agenda, conservatism *can* triumph—the forces of freedom can prevail. But they cannot do so unless we rally intelligently and purposefully to their side. ♣

GUARANTEED INCOME FOR LIFE

The Hillsdale College Gift Annuity Program offers excellent income in today's market.

IMMEDIATE DONOR TAX DEDUCTION
IMMEDIATE BENEFIT TO HILLSDALE COLLEGE

Selected Single-Life Annuity Rates

AGE 65	–	6.5%
AGE 70	–	6.9%
AGE 75	–	7.7%
AGE 80	–	8.8%
AGE 85	–	10.0%
AGE 90+	–	11.0%

Please call our Gift and Estate Planning Office for more information at **1-800-334-8904**.

IMPRIMIS (im-pri-mis), taking its name from the Latin term, "in the first place," is the publication of Hillsdale College. Executive Editor, Ronald L. Trowbridge; Managing Editor, Lissa Roche; Assistant, Patricia A. DuBois. Illustrations by Tom Curtis. The opinions expressed in IMPRIMIS may be, but are not necessarily, the views of Hillsdale College and its External Programs division. Copyright © 1994. Permission to reprint in whole or part is hereby granted, provided a version of the following credit line is used: "Reprinted by permission from IMPRIMIS, the monthly journal of Hillsdale College." Subscription free upon request. ISSN 0277-8432. Circulation 510,000 worldwide, established 1972. IMPRIMIS trademark registered in U.S. Patent and Trade Office #1563325.

IMPRIMIS

VOLUME 23 • NUMBER 3

FORWARDING AND RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to IMPRIMIS

Hillsdale College

Hillsdale, Michigan 49242

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Hillsdale College

Do we have your correct address?
Indicate changes here. Or call:
1-800-437-2268